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New York

President:	Sir Emyr Jones Parry	(United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Belle
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Arias
	Peru	Ms. Tincopa
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Qahtani
	Russian Federation	Mr. Dolgov
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	South Africa	Mr. Kumalo
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation in Africa

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

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07-29528 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Africa

Briefing by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator.

It is so decided.

I invite Sir John to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

The Security Council will now hear a briefing by Sir John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Holmes: Mr. President, I wish to thank you for this opportunity to brief the Security Council on my first mission to the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic.

I chose this region for my first visit because Darfur is the world's largest humanitarian operation and because throughout the region we face particularly difficult challenges to civilian protection. I will take the three countries in alphabetical order, not least to ensure that the points I want to make about the Central African Republic in particular are not overshadowed by Darfur, thus reflecting what too often happens in reality. I will report in French on the Central African Republic and Chad, and I will revert to English for the Sudan.

(*spoke in French*)

In the Central African Republic, I first visited Paoua, in the north-west region of the country. Following the fighting that took place on 28 January between rebels of the Armée pour la Restauration de la République et de la Démocratie (APRD) and the Forces Armées Centrafricaines (FACA), part of the population of Paoua and of surrounding villages fled into the bush, where they remain today. I was able to visit certain villages that had been completely or partially burned, plundered and depopulated.

There are no real camps for displaced persons. On the contrary, displaced persons remain scattered in the bush, which makes it particularly difficult to locate them, as they tend to flee when a vehicle approaches. I was, however, able to meet with a number of displaced persons, see the conditions in which they live and hear their often moving stories. Displaced persons are generally clustered by family groups, a few kilometres from their home and their fields. There they have nothing — no drinking water, no shelter, no health or education services.

Those people told me almost unanimously that they had not fled the rebels but, rather, reprisals by FACA and the Presidential Guard. They also stated that they did not feel safe enough to return to their villages. It is also clear that the State is no longer present in any form. People have been left to fend for themselves.

Other areas of the country have been affected in a comparable manner. In Kaga Bandoro, as well as in Birao, in the north-east, fighting last month between rebels of the Union des Forces Démocratiques pour le Rassemblement and governmental forces, along with the settling of scores that followed, destroyed 70 per cent of the town and caused the population to flee. I used the word "comparable" because it seems that in certain regions the burning and plundering of villages was the work of the rebels rather than of governmental forces. Lastly, I could not refer to the disastrous security situation in the northern Central African Republic without mentioning the actions of highway bandits and road blockers, which have a devastating impact on civilians.

Humanitarian organizations estimate that 1 million people of the Central African Republic — about a quarter of the population — are in need of humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is estimated to have risen from 50,000 to 212,000 in less than a year. In addition, there are 70,000 refugees in Chad and Cameroon. That situation, which is disturbing to say the least, could

further deteriorate in the coming months, particularly during the rainy season.

It is clear that, despite a very enthusiastic team on the ground, the humanitarian response remains insufficient. We need more partners, more resources and more advocacy. In this regard, I appeal to United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors. By 31 March, only 18 per cent of the $54 million United Nations humanitarian appeal for the Central African Republic had been financed.

Here, as elsewhere, humanitarian assistance can be only a palliative. A lasting solution requires that the Central African Republic authorities meet their obligation to protect the civilian population and put an end to impunity. I made that clear to both President Bozizé and Prime Minister Dote. I do not believe, however, that the authorities of the Central African Republic — despite their stated goodwill — are in a position to confront that challenge alone. The international community, including the Council, must therefore assume its responsibilities with a view to finding political and security solutions to this political and security crisis.

In political terms, the various parties to the conflict must urgently agree to a ceasefire and begin negotiations aimed at achieving a lasting political solution, as recommended by the Group of the Wise.

As regards the security situation, a dramatically accelerated reform effort is needed to support the efforts of the Central African Government to restore its authority throughout the territory and to establish a professional and disciplined army that is capable of protecting the population, with respect for international humanitarian law.

Furthermore, we must urgently ensure better protection of the borders of the Central African Republic, particularly the border with Darfur. This prompts me to wonder about the approach to be adopted: must the deployment of a multidimensional force in the north-east of the Central African Republic be dependent on the acceptance by the Chadian authorities of an international presence on their own territory? Another possibility would be to ask the African Union and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community to study the possibility of strengthening the mandate and the role of the 380 soldiers of its Multinational Force. This could include, for example, the monitoring of military activities in the north of the country and in border areas.

The Central African Republic remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Despite that fact, over the past two years the country has made significant progress, as attested to by the return in 2006 of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The democratically elected Government seems to want to take up the economic and development challenges facing the country. The international community must accompany the people of the Central African Republic in that effort, and must respond to the humanitarian needs in the north and prevent the security and political crises there from wiping out the progress that has been achieved.

Regarding the situation in eastern Chad, in particular Goz Beida, which I visited, I have little to report to the Council. I would like to quote from the June 2006 report (S/2006/433) of the mission which you, Mr. President, led to eastern Chad. Paragraph 55 of that report states:

> "In Goz Beida ... humanitarian organizations ... [expressed] considerable concern at the deteriorating security situation ... particularly the frequent rebel movement through, and recruitment within, the camps, as well as the Janjaweed attacks against villages. They stressed that, unless better protection was provided, the humanitarian character of their operations would be seriously compromised. They were also concerned at the negative impact of the refugees on the local environment, in particular the use of scarce local resources."

Almost one year later, humanitarian concerns in eastern Chad remain. Finding pragmatic responses to this is more essential and urgent than ever. Since the Council mission, the situation in eastern Chad has deteriorated significantly. The Chadian army, which is focused on other objectives, has abandoned a large part of the east of the country to militias and armed groups of all kinds. A great deal of ethnic and political violence has thus ensued.

Since the autumn of 2006, hundreds of people have been killed. Dozens of villages have been burned down. In just a few months, the number of displaced persons in eastern Chad has risen from 50,000 to 140,000, including more than 100,000 in the department of Dar Sila alone, of which Goz Beida is

the main town. The militarization of refugee camps and IDP areas has accelerated. The phenomenon of forced recruitment, including of children, is becoming a major problem. Finally, pressure on local populations and on the region's natural resources — in particular, water — which were already difficult to manage, is reaching an unsustainable level. The humanitarian organizations, which in the past had always been able to deal with the problem, are in danger of being overwhelmed.

There can be no doubt, therefore, that the humanitarian response must be stronger, swifter and more strategic. In particular, we must respond in a better coordinated way to the most urgent needs before the rainy season begins. That is why I have decided to further strengthen the presence in Chad of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Furthermore, we must recognize that refugees and displaced persons will not be able to return home over the next few months. We therefore now need to define a longer-term strategy. This should include finding lasting solutions to the continued presence of refugees and displaced persons and proposing balanced assistance that takes into account the needs of the host populations. Relocating the most exposed refugee camps must also be a priority, with full respect for current international rules and for the dignity of the refugees. In order to ensure that those measures are properly implemented, it is important that donors finance the $174 million humanitarian appeal for Chad. To date, only 23 per cent has been financed.

I must warn the Council, however, that if nothing is done to improve the security situation in eastern Chad, the humanitarian situation will continue to deteriorate, because humanitarian needs will continue to increase, while humanitarian organizations — whose access to the most venerable populations is already restricted by the current security environment — will no longer be able to respond to new needs. To avoid that disastrous scenario, it is essential — as I said to Prime Minister Coumakoye — that the Chadian Government begin to combat impunity and provide protection to Chadian and refugee populations in the east of Chad.

It is also vital that the discussions under way between Council members and the Government on the deployment of a multidimensional force conclude as swiftly as possible. Indeed, in my view, and as indicated in the Secretary-General's report on the subject (S/2007/97), an international security presence is essential to ensure the protection of refugees and displaced persons in eastern Chad.

(*spoke in English*)

Let me finally turn to the Sudan. This week marks a sad anniversary: it was on 2 April 2004, three years ago this week, that the Council heard its first briefing on Darfur, by my predecessor, Jan Egeland. Three years ago, 230 relief workers in Darfur were struggling to assist 350,000 people. Today, more than 13,000 relief workers aim to help almost 4 million people affected by the conflict, more than 2 million of whom are displaced. I was impressed by the scale — and, in many respects, the success — of the operation. I was inspired by the dedication and courage of the relief workers.

Currently, while there is relatively little actual fighting between Government forces and the rebel groups, violent incidents occur almost daily, from bloody tribal clashes in South Darfur, through continued Janjaweed and other militia attacks on villages, to the present state of generalized insecurity and lawlessness, in which unpredictable violence and impunity are the rule. If military casualties are relatively few, civilians remain the principal victims. The need for massive humanitarian assistance continues to grow, with the international community providing 95 per cent of the $800 million or so now needed every year, because the problem itself continues to grow remorselessly.

Over the past six months, nearly a quarter of a million more innocent civilians have been forced to abandon their homes, seeking refuge mainly from Government-supported militia attacks. They have fled to camps in all three Darfur states — in many cases, to camps that were already beyond capacity. Well over a third of the population — at 2.2 million people — is now displaced. At the current rate, the same could be true for over half the population in another 18 months or so. That is a truly horrifying prospect. Meanwhile, the politicization and militarization of camps have become a fact of life, creating a time bomb just waiting to go off.

One of the saddest facts about the three years that have passed is that the people who were in the camps then are still there today, no doubt beginning to lose hope of ever being able to return to their homes and their former lives.

Violations of humanitarian law and abuses of human rights — not the least of which is gender-based violence — continue unchecked. On 16 March, just two weeks ago, a 10-year-old girl and a 12-year-old girl were raped, apparently by police officers, in the Tawilla IDP camp in North Darfur. As I walked through the Al Salaam camp, near El Fasher, also in North Darfur, hundreds of little girls and boys trailed in my wake. I could not help but wonder how many might yet suffer that horror themselves.

I said that the humanitarian operation in Darfur has been, in many respects, a success. The majority of the 4 million people in need appear to have adequate food, clean water and basic sanitation, shelter, medical care and — at least in some cases — access to rudimentary education. However, and fundamentally, as I have already made clear, we have all failed to protect people effectively from violence and abuses, even if the humanitarian presence itself can represent a significant deterrent, as do the successive reports about what is going on in Darfur — for example, the recent damning report of the Human Rights Council.

No one party to the conflict can claim the moral high ground; all parties appear to be responsible for these continuing and widespread violations of international humanitarian law and abuses of human rights. Nevertheless, as I reminded them at every opportunity, the Government of the Sudan has the primary responsibility for protecting its population and is accountable for the proper investigation and prosecution of those accused of committing crimes.

There are also a number of threats to the humanitarian effort itself that could easily lead to its unravelling. The first is the sheer scale of that effort. How long can the international community sustain such a costly and difficult operation? How long can the people of Darfur bear the human cost?

The second threat is to access, which has been shrinking steadily for some time now. The position varies from day to day, but at any one time there are up to a million people whom we cannot reach. For example, I visited a rebel-held area in the Jebel Marra, which has had virtually no help for several months because the main road is blocked and where lack of a decent diet and medical care is beginning to tell. The biggest obstacle to free access is, of course, the general and unpredictable insecurity in Darfur. The impact of that limited access is already beginning to be seen in the main nutrition and health indicators, which are beginning to turn once again in the wrong direction.

But there are also significant bureaucratic obstacles. I experienced this third threat first-hand when I was stopped and turned around at a military checkpoint just outside Kutum in North Darfur while trying to visit the Kassab camp. Although the Government later apologized, if such an incident could happen on my visit, with journalists documenting my every step, one can easily imagine the daily struggles faced by aid workers on the ground in Darfur — a point that I made forcefully both to the local authorities and to the central Government.

Despite that personal experience, I can report some recent potential progress. On 28 March, the Government of the Sudan signed a further joint communiqué with the United Nations designed to alleviate the administrative burdens that have so severely hampered the relief operation in recent months. The communiqué commits the Government of the Sudan to the speedy delivery of visas, permits and customs clearance, with specific deadlines. It also establishes a joint follow-up committee, co-chaired by the Sudanese Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator, which will meet monthly. Full and continued implementation of all aspects of that agreement is not too much to expect. The Government of the Sudan should do all it can to facilitate the work of those who are saving the lives of its own citizens.

The fourth threat is the continuing consequences of violence against the aid workers themselves. Staff have been physically and verbally abused, offices and residences raided and personal belongings stolen. Vehicles are routinely hijacked at gunpoint, often in broad daylight — even, on occasion, right in state capitals. Here too, none of the parties can claim innocence. In short, those who have come to help the population are now themselves targets, not helped by a media campaign about the supposed crimes of relief workers, including suggestions of espionage and hidden political agendas.

One particular incident, in Nyala in January, involved a raid conducted by Government officials on an NGO compound. Twenty United Nations, NGO and African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) staff were arrested, verbally and physically abused and charged with criminal offences. I asked all those I met from the

Government to ensure that those charges would be dropped altogether. The humanitarian community rightly feels doubly victimized in this incident. Those concerned were not only assaulted, but then themselves charged with a crime, literally adding insult to injury. I strongly urge once again that my request be quickly acted upon. However, the latest news that those concerned have been asked to appear in court tomorrow in Nyala does not look like the symbol of cooperation that the international community is expecting.

Let me deal with one important point in that context. During my trip, Government officials repeatedly suggested that some NGOs were engaged in inappropriate political activities in Darfur. That allegation usually appeared to refer to advocacy activities concerning the protection of civilians from abuse of their rights. In other words, giving food and shelter is acceptable; speaking out about violations of humanitarian law is not. But speaking out to protect civilians is part of the core of humanitarian action today and reflects the overwhelming concern of the international community — and this Council — with the safety and protection of civilians in Darfur. I expect that kind of insidious pressure on agencies, and discrimination between "good" and "bad" ones, to cease.

Let me also take this opportunity to offer my deepest condolences to the families of the five Senegalese AMIS protection force soldiers killed in Darfur on Sunday. That grievous loss, following so closely after the murder of two AMIS peacekeepers in Gereida exactly one month ago, is yet another example of those who come to assist the population of Darfur themselves being targeted.

In sum, despite its scale and success in sustaining millions and saving literally hundreds of thousands of lives, the Darfur humanitarian operation is increasingly fragile. The agencies and the people keeping it going are under growing pressure from the factors I have described. Morale is low. If things do not get better, or if there were to be more serious incidents involving humanitarian workers, some organizations could start to withdraw, and the operation could start to unravel. Then we could face a rapid humanitarian catastrophe. No one wants that. We must do everything in our power to avoid it. But the Government of the Sudan has a particular responsibility to ensure that it is avoided. I hope, from the bottom of my heart, that I do not have to do another briefing like this one, or an even worse one, next April.

I also visited Juba, in southern Sudan, to review humanitarian efforts there in the context of the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. While there has been significant progress, such as the beginning of the return of refugees and IDPs, other issues — including those relating to the Abyei boundary, the realignment of forces and demobilization — remain outstanding. However, while the immediate humanitarian need is diminishing, there is an urgent need to increase recovery and development assistance to help maintain peace. In particular, Darfur must not distract the international community from the fundamental importance of the north-south Agreement. On the other side, as the Government of southern Sudan themselves clearly recognizes, they have a huge stake in a peaceful and rapid resolution of the conflict in Darfur.

Similarly, the success of the peace talks between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda, which are set to restart later this month, is vital. A peaceful resolution to that 20-year conflict would not only help to stabilize the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, it would also relieve one of the longest-standing humanitarian crises in Africa — with 1.4 million people still displaced in northern Uganda. Special Envoy Chissano's work has been critical in reinforcing that African-led initiative. For our part, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs will continue to support the Juba Initiative Project, together with our colleagues in the Departments of Political Affairs and Peacekeeping Operations.

Let me conclude — and I apologize for the length of my presentation — with a few brief thoughts about what I saw and heard overall.

First, I was struck by the complexity of the conflicts in each of the countries I visited, involving as they do, in addition to deep political problems, many-layered mixes of ancient rivalries and tensions between different ethnic and tribal groups, between pastoralists and farmers, exacerbated by the encroachment of the desert and the breakdown of traditional structures, and between leaders with complex past and present relationships.

Secondly, there is a clear regional aspect to the conflicts that drive the deep humanitarian problems with which we are trying to grapple. The spillover

effect from Darfur is clear, not least in eastern Chad. If we are going to solve the individual conflicts in a lasting way, we need a regional approach in which the issues are tackled, as far as possible, in parallel.

Thirdly, however, there is a clearly internal aspect to each conflict as well, as tempting as it is for the Governments concerned to shift all the blame onto Darfur. In other words, there have to be national solutions in addition to the regional approach.

Fourthly, and finally, in each country the fundamental and crying need is above all for political solutions brought about through dialogue and mediation, aided from outside where necessary but relying on national actors themselves. That means that the politicians and leaders concerned must cease to play protracted games with each other with little or no thought for the lives and livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens, whom the international community meanwhile keeps alive. For the international community itself it means investing more intensely than ever in conflict prevention, resolution and mediation. There is no more important actor in that endeavour than the United Nations Security Council. That is the best investment of all, especially compared to the appalling human cost of what we see in the three countries I visited. Of course, what we are spending on the sticking plaster of massive humanitarian aid could be so much more productively spent on development.

The President: I thank Sir John for his first briefing to the Council. I am sure I speak for the Council in wishing him every success in his stewardship of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who have inscribed their names on the list and who wish to make comments or ask questions in response to the briefing we have just heard.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): Two years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, southern Sudan continues to face considerable humanitarian recovery challenges, including the need to support hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons, most of whom are returning to the south. That situation has been further complicated by the onset of a meningitis epidemic that has spread across eight of the ten southern states.

We are extremely concerned about the worsening situation in Darfur. Despite the notable successes by humanitarian workers, we cannot deny that there is heightened insecurity and targeting of aid workers. Humanitarian operations will slow considerably unless the situation improves and workers are granted greater access to those in need. Given that untenable situation, we once again appeal to the Government of the Sudan to grant greater access to aid workers. Those persons can reach a greater number of people in dire need of assistance if there is adequate security and if unpredictable violent attacks on them stop.

There is an urgent need for the international community to tackle adequately the humanitarian challenges in Chad, where there are more than 400,000 refugees and displaced persons. It is apparent that the number of those unfortunate victims will increase because of the situation in Darfur and the Central African Republic. Growing violence in eastern Chad will seriously disrupt humanitarian operations, where United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing a remarkable job.

We recall the warning issued last week by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator that the international community was dragging its feet on funding for humanitarian operations in Chad and was underestimating the scale of the crisis there. Given the dire humanitarian situation in Chad, we encourage donors to contribute to the $174 million needed to provide food, water and shelter in eastern Chad. The $40 million received so far cannot meet the various needs of those unfortunate victims.

The number of internally displaced persons in several parts of the Central African Republic tripled in 2006. In the most affected areas the lack of development and the widespread insecurity have plunged vulnerable populations into a situation of acute emergency. We wish to express serious concern about reports of summary executions, the targeting and persecution of specific ethnic groups and the recurring partial or complete torching of villages. It is recalled that, under international humanitarian law, civilians have an absolute right to protection in time of conflict. We thereby appeal to all parties to this conflict to take measures to ensure the safety of civilians, as insecurity remains the prime cause of displacement.

We know that the United Nations is appealing for $49 million for the Central African Republic for the

year 2007. Thus far, less than 0.4 per cent of that amount has been provided. Early funding is crucial to enable humanitarian agencies to plan and start programmes to reach those in need in time.

We wish to commend President Chissano for his for efforts to find a lasting solution to the conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda. We urge the parties to commit themselves to restarting the peace talks as soon as practicable.

The Emergency Relief Coordinator has drawn the world's attention to the humanitarian catastrophes in the areas I have mentioned. He added that without security, all the humanitarian assistance in the world will not change the situation. The urgent need for us to find political solutions to the political problems in all three instances cannot be overemphasized.

Mr. Kumalo (South Africa): Let me also thank Sir John Holmes for his very comprehensive briefing. I must confess, though, that it was rather depressing to listen and to hear about the continued suffering of the people in Chad, the Central African Republic and the Sudan. But one of the bright spots of his briefing came at the end, when Sir John began to share some of his thoughts regarding his visit to the region. I am particularly pleased that among the impressions that he had is that of the regional nature of the situation. My delegation has always argued that, until the international community resolves the situation in Darfur, people will always suffer in the camps in Chad, the Central African Republic and elsewhere. Darfur is the key; until the situation is unlocked, the suffering will continue. Unfortunately, no amount of help or aid given will be enough as long as the political situation in Darfur is not resolved.

We also share the view of Mr. Holmes that the situation in Darfur is also threatening to affect the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the North and the South of the Sudan. If that goes, then the situation will be really even more tragic than it is. What the situation in Darfur needs is a very intense political effort to try and bring about a solution that can embrace the rebel forces, the Government of the Sudan and all the other actors in the area so as to establish peace there.

The terrifying thought is that the only thing that seems to ameliorate the situation in Darfur is, of course, the presence of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). AMIS, however, is not going to be there forever; in fact, AMIS is threatening to leave by June or July this year. Then the people of Darfur will really be left to the mercy of the Janjaweed, the bandits and all those other characters that Mr. Holmes described so well in his testimony.

I therefore think that we, too, wish to join the call to the international community to redouble our efforts in trying to resolve the situation in Darfur. Until we are successful there, there will always be people who will flee for their lives into Chad and the Central African Republic, where they face even more challenges.

I am very pleased that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is shining a spotlight on the conditions of the people there. We have been waiting for this report to come out and remind us that it is really about the people who are suffering in that part of the world. Sometimes, here, we get involved in all the difficult issues of political complications that can overshadow the fact that it is the people who are suffering. I am glad that the United Nations is finally doing what it does best, which is to remind the international community that, while we argue about hybrids, letters, memos and all the rest, the people on the ground continue to suffer; the people on the ground remain at the mercy of the Janjaweed and all the other characters there; and the people on the ground are the ones who we have to remember, because it is about them in the end.

So I say this to thank Mr. Holmes for the report. It is a very difficult report to hear. He said that he hoped that he would not have to give it again; we, too, would hope that we will hear a different report next time, but at the pace at which we are going it is doubtful that we will be that successful. Let us hope we are.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): At the outset, I wish to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his briefing.

China is deeply concerned about the humanitarian crises that continue to inflict some African countries. China believes that the humanitarian crises in Africa have different root causes and complex backgrounds. They include both large-scale armed conflicts that have led to numerous civilian casualties and displacement, as in the current situation in Somalia, and traditional ethnic, tribal and religious conflicts that give rise to local political crises that exacerbate the humanitarian

situation, as in the case of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda and in Darfur in the Sudan. Moreover, long periods of economic underdevelopment have led to widespread poverty and its concomitant human tragedies.

Since the causes differ, the responses should also vary. Efforts should be made to halt and prevent regional conflicts and to stop large-scale humanitarian disasters from arising and spreading. Efforts should also be made to avoid political approaches that exacerbate such situations and to promote political reconciliation, harmony and unity in the countries concerned. Africa should be assisted in good faith to develop its economies, shake off poverty and improve its standards of living. In general, it is imperative to take a targeted approach to address both the root causes and the symptoms, to prioritize practical deeds over empty words, to avoid talking about humanitarian crises in abstract and isolated ways, and, above all, to avoid politicizing humanitarian issues.

The international community is duty-bound to help Africa alleviate its humanitarian crises. We appreciate the tireless efforts of the United Nations and other international humanitarian relief organizations. We appeal to the international parties to continue to use their respective advantages and to pool their collective wisdom and efforts with a view to integrating the management of such crises. The donors concerned should honour their pledges in true earnest, increase their funding for humanitarian assistance in Africa, and address the shortfall in funding for humanitarian efforts as a matter of urgency.

The Chinese Government has always attached great importance to helping the countries of Africa to improve their humanitarian situation. Over the years, the Chinese Government has actively participated, to the best of its abilities and in various ways, in international humanitarian relief efforts in Africa. In the future, we will continue to join in such efforts of the international community.

Ms. Wolcott Sanders (United States of America): I, too, should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his informative briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic. It is particularly helpful to hear his first-hand observations, and we are grateful that Mr. Holmes decided to focus his first field mission as Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs on that most pressing crisis.

The United States shares the view that the international effort since 2004 has been largely successful in stabilizing the humanitarian situation in Darfur. The large-scale relief effort has helped bring mortality and malnutrition levels below emergency thresholds. However, as Under-Secretary-General Holmes noted, in the past year key indicators have taken a turn for the worse and our collective gains are now under threat. Rising violence — including targeted attacks on aid workers, increasingly restricted access to populations in need, and the Government of the Sudan's continuing bureaucratic stranglehold on relief efforts — keep Darfur on the bring of catastrophe. We commend the recent agreement between the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan to lift restrictions for humanitarian workers in Darfur. However, we note that similar commitments have been made and not honoured in the past. We therefore call again on the Government of the Sudan to abide by its commitments and to lift its obstruction of humanitarian operations in Darfur.

We are deeply concerned about the continuing rise of violence in Darfur, including the direct targeting of humanitarian workers through vehicle hijacking, detentions and armed invasions of non-governmental organization (NGO) compounds. United Nations and NGO staff who coordinate security awareness among humanitarian actors are increasingly harassed and prevented from doing their job. This environment of violence and intimidation affects the morale of relief workers who are already working in an incredibly challenging environment and negatively impacts the ability of United Nations agencies and NGOs to recruit and deploy qualified staff.

In the last week, we have witnessed further violence in eastern Chad, displacing up to 8,000 civilians in an area already hosting a large number of Sudanese refugees. That highlights the broader impact of the Darfur conflict on neighbouring regions. We strongly support Under-Secretary-General Holmes' call for the deployment of a peacekeeping force to eastern Chad and encourage the United Nations to finalize modalities for such a force with the Government of Chad as soon as possible.

We share Mr. Holmes' positive outlook on the humanitarian situation in southern Sudan. With a negotiated settlement to the more than 20 years of civil war, the people of southern Sudan are now able to focus on recovery and development. We recognize that continued support for the rehabilitation of social and economic infrastructure in southern Sudan is critical to sustainable peace and development.

We also recognize that assistance to returning refugees and internally displaced persons, as well as support for the communities that receive them, is central to southern Sudan's recovery. We salute the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration in leading efforts to assist displaced Sudanese to return home and restart their lives.

Ending the violence and suffering in Darfur remains among the highest priorities for the United States. We continue to work closely with the United Nations, the African Union and our international partners to stop the conflict, ensure the delivery of humanitarian relief and hold accountable those individuals responsible for atrocities against the people of Darfur.

We welcome the recent conversations between Secretary-General Ban and President Al-Bashir affirming the commitment of the Government of the Sudan to the consensus reached on 16 November 2006 in Addis Ababa. We call on the Government of the Sudan to honour its commitments and facilitate implementation of the agreed-upon framework, including the deployment of a hybrid United Nations-African Union peacekeeping force to Darfur. The Security Council will judge the commitment of the Government of the Sudan by real advancement towards peace and security for the people of Darfur.

Mr. Belle (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): Thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate. I also thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Holmes, for his report on his recent mission to Africa.

We would first like to make a few comments on the situation in Darfur. Belgium is extremely concerned by the worsening of violence and tensions in Darfur since last summer. The death of five Senegalese soldiers of the African Union Mission in Sudan offers us a sad example of this escalation, and, like Mr. Holmes, we wish to express our condolences to the families of those soldiers. The attacks against civilians, carried out as much by the Governmental forces as by the rebel forces and militias, are continuing, and serious violations of international law are increasing in number. Such violations are clearly unacceptable, and we cannot tolerate their continuation.

While underscoring the chief responsibility of the Government of the Sudan, Belgium insists that all parties must ensure the protection of civilians. In order to halt the spiral of violence, the Government of the Sudan must put an end to impunity and must immediately arrest those responsible so that they can answer for their acts. Belgium welcomes the consensus last week in the Human Rights Council, which is a sign of the profound concern of the entire international community with the human rights situation in Darfur.

The deterioration in the security situation has also hampered delivery of aid to Darfur. Mr. Holmes touched upon this issue. Belgium is concerned that the level of risk for humanitarian organizations has become so high that the largest humanitarian operations in the world are now threatened. In this respect, Belgium welcomes the discussions with the Sudanese Government on the access of humanitarian assistance, on guarantees for security for humanitarian workers and on the removal of red tape.

In addition, Belgium welcomes the signing between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations on 28 March of the joint communiqué on the facilitation of humanitarian activities in Darfur. We hope that this commitment by the Government will be swiftly put into practice.

More generally speaking, Belgium feels that to ensure peace in Darfur, the international community must pursue a global strategy made up of several sectors. These sectors must be complementary and not interchangeable. In parallel, we must increase the efforts to restart the political process on the basis of the Darfur peace agreement, rapidly deploy an effective and robust peacekeeping force, and lastly, exert pressure on the parties to cooperate.

In the short term, given the extreme volatility of the security and humanitarian situation, it is important that the heavy support package be implemented on an urgent basis. We share Mr. Holmes' analysis that the situation in Darfur has distracted the attention of the international community from the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in southern Sudan. We believe the international

community must prod parties to take effective measures to accelerate the implementation of the CPA. The international community must firmly pursue its commitment to assist in this implementation.

Mr. Holmes mentioned the regional dimension of the humanitarian crisis, in particular the fact that it affects Chad and the Central African Republic. Like Mr. Holmes, Belgium is concerned about the repercussions of the various aspects of the humanitarian situation on the civilian populations in those two countries, Chad and the Central African Republic. My delegation is convinced that the protection of civilians, displaced persons and refugees must be the absolute priority of the international community. Indeed, we must act diligently in order to stem the propagation of conflict in Darfur.

We are concerned about the continuing inter-community and transborder conflicts in eastern Chad. Over the last three months these conflicts have led to a spectacular increase in the number of displaced persons — now 140,000 individuals — and have exacerbated the insecurity within and around the twelve refugee camps, as well as in the towns and villages.

Belgium strongly condemns any exploitation of populations, any forced recruitment, including of children, by the various rebel groups.

Belgium is also concerned by the security conditions in the north of the Central African Republic. The security situation there remains very precarious, as Mr. Holmes indicated. Information that the number of people who had to leave their homes due to violence now exceeds 280,000 persons is disturbing. We note that President Bozizé is carrying out an in-depth investigation of all the acts of violence of which members of the military may be guilty. Here again, in order to bring about lasting peace, it is necessary to fight impunity.

More generally speaking, Belgium supports, in principle, the dispatch of a peacekeeping force to Chad and the Central African Republic in order to protect endangered civilian populations and to prevent cross-border attacks. Deployment should have the prior agreement of the Governments concerned, and the force should have sufficient means and a robust mandate so that it can effectively ensure safety and security both for itself and for the civilian populations. For Belgium, one of the essential lessons learned over the past few years has been that the dispatch of a force must be planned with a view to supporting the prospects for a political process.

I wish in conclusion to stress that the humanitarian situation in other African countries too demands the closest attention of the international community.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): I too would like to thank Mr. Holmes for his sobering briefing and his observations on his recent trip to the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic, in the face of enormous challenges to civilian protection, owing to the continuing conflict in Darfur and its spillover effects, which are causing increasing humanitarian suffering for hundreds of thousands of civilians. We share Mr. Holmes' concern about the further deterioration of the situation on the ground and the growing number of people affected by the conflict and by attacks on their camps and violations of human rights and humanitarian law. We call on the Government of the Sudan and other Governments to fulfil their obligations with regard to their primary responsibility to protect their own civilian populations.

Since the delivery of humanitarian relief is of critical importance, we would like to pay tribute to all the humanitarian agencies that remain active despite the violence and attacks against their workers. A number of reports point out that the targeting of humanitarian operations, staff and equipment has become routine in Darfur, and we are worried that humanitarian work could become unsustainable in the long run. We urge the Government of the Sudan to remain engaged and extend its full cooperation to humanitarian agencies.

Slovakia welcomes the recent signing of a communiqué between the United Nations and the Government of the Sudan to alleviate the administrative burden that is hampering relief operations, as well as the extension of the moratorium on restrictions placed upon the operations of non-governmental organizations. However, we would like to express our continuing concern about the bureaucratic impediments to humanitarian work in Darfur, including delays in the issuance of visas and work permits.

Slovakia believes that the international community should address the humanitarian needs of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region

in a robust, timely and effective fashion. That is why would like also to reiterate our position that we see the deployment of an effective international peacekeeping force in the region as the only way to save lives among the people in Darfur, eastern Chad and the north-eastern Central African Republic.

Since impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity is unacceptable, it should be crystal clear that individuals responsible for atrocities committed in Darfur and in neighbouring States must be held accountable. In that regard, we fully support the investigation by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, and we call upon the Government of the Sudan to provide all necessary cooperation in that regard.

To prevent violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law, we believe that the Council should also consider making more effective use of targeted sanctions in the future.

Finally, Slovakia remains gravely concerned over the humanitarian situation in a number of countries in Africa. Since we are fully aware of the dire situation of civilians, especially woman and children, trapped in armed conflict, we would like to support the continuing efforts of the United Nations to strengthen the protection of civilians and humanitarian mechanisms, enabling the international community to respond in a timely and efficient manner to humanitarian crises and emergencies.

In that context, we would like to ask the Under-Secretary-General what other parts of Africa he plans to visit in the future. Since we are deeply concerned about the current humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe, we would appreciate it if Mr. Holmes could give us an indication of whether he plans also to pay a visit to Zimbabwe.

Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro (Congo) (*spoke in French*): I wish on behalf of my delegation to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for his comprehensive, instructive and moving briefing on the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan, including Darfur and Southern Sudan. To be sure, the picture is dark and the challenges are enormous. The responsibility must be shared at all levels: the international community, in particular the Security Council, must shoulder its portion of the responsibility.

This is a tragic situation affecting the lives of people who are grave danger. We cannot accept the notion of the Governments — and more generally speaking the political authorities — of the countries in question sidestepping their responsibility. But as the Under-Secretary-General said so lucidly, the situation is complex, and no single country can respond to it alone. We therefore support the Under-Secretary-General's appeal that solutions be found at the national level through pressure exerted upon all the political actors in the countries concerned. In that connection, the constraints placed on the work of humanitarian personnel are intolerable, and we condemn them.

At the same time, we lay particular stress on international assistance, provided through regional strategies for resolving the serious problems that have led to the painful situation currently afflicting civilian populations in the Central African Republic, Chad and Darfur.

Mr. Dolgov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We too are pleased to welcome Mr. John Holmes, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator. On the occasion of his first meeting with the Security Council we wish him every success in his important post.

As confirmed in Mr. Holmes' briefing on his trip to the region, the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, Chad and the Sudan continues to be cause for great and justified concern. We are particularly concerned at the growing number of refugees and internally displaced persons and of attacks by armed groups against the civilian population. The security context in which the United Nations and the humanitarian agencies must work is a particularly difficult one.

The humanitarian problems in Darfur — and throughout the conflict area — can be resolved only with the attainment of a stable political solution to the crisis; this requires that all armed groups that remain outside the Darfur Peace Agreement become part of that agreement. We support the efforts of Mr. Jan Eliasson, Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Darfur, and of Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, the African Union mediator for Darfur, to attain a comprehensive peace agreement.

Of great importance are the decisions reached, with Mr. Holmes' assistance, by the Government of the

Sudan, and the 28 March signing of a joint communiqué by the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations on facilitating humanitarian activities in Darfur. We expect the communiqué to be fully and strictly implemented by the Government of the Sudan.

It is the Government of the Sudan that bears primary responsibility for the safety of civilians in Darfur. But without effective support from the United Nations, that goal is unlikely to be met. Therefore we deem it important speedily to implement the plan for a phased solution to the question of Darfur, as proposed by the Secretary-General, through a heavy support package for the African Union mission in Darfur and the subsequent deployment there of a hybrid operation, with the participation of the United Nations and the African Union.

It is important, in the context of dialogue with the Government of the Sudan, that agreement be reached on parameters for the United Nations peacekeeping contribution in Darfur.

The recommendations of the Secretary-General could help to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Chad, the Central African Republic and southern Sudan. The recommendations relate to the deployment in various regions of the Sudan of a United Nations peacekeeping force whose primary objective would be to protect the civilian population. The specific modalities for such a presence must be agreed upon by the United Nations and the Governments of those countries. We support the work done by the Secretariat in that area.

Improving the humanitarian situation in the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic will not be possible without continuing assistance, including food assistance, on the part of the international community. We deem fully justified the use of the Central Emergency Response Fund to help underfunded humanitarian activities for the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic, and we hope that funds will be allocated on an objective, non-policitized basis.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Holmes, for his very detailed briefing. We, too, are very pleased at his appointment, and we wish him every possible success in his highly important mission. We welcome the fact that his first trip was to a region where the humanitarian situation is particularly serious — a situation that our Council has addressed and must continue to address.

The gravity of the humanitarian situation, as just described to us, in the Sudan, in Darfur, in Chad and in the Central African Republic raises numerous questions and makes it clear that it should be a source of great concern to us. I believe that what is most striking in Darfur is the deterioration of humanitarian indicators, which are nearing emergency levels, despite the fact that a slight improvement had been noted last year owing to the extraordinary and tremendous efforts undertaken by humanitarian workers in Darfur. In his letter to the Secretary-General dated 6 March, President Bashir reiterated the stability of those indicators.

It is therefore particularly disturbing, I think, to hear that the deterioration of the situation in Darfur could seriously undermine the remarkable work done by actors working in the field. I believe that the courage demonstrated by the thousands of humanitarian personnel who continue working despite the violence, harassment and threats they face, and despite the constraints imposed on their access to the approximately 4 million people in Darfur who depend on international assistance, should be commended by the Council. I am fully confident that the presidency will find a way to express the Council's appreciation of the work being done by humanitarian personnel in the field, who deserve our full support.

Moreover, we find particularly disturbing the continuing displacement of persons in Darfur since the early part of the year. Tens of thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes since January because of the prevailing situation of insecurity and the violence against civilians. Camps have reached the limits of their capacity, even as additional displaced persons continue to arrive daily. I believe that the Council must focus on this issue. In addition, the shocking information we have received concerning acts of savagery and the widespread occurrence of acts of sexual violence must strengthen our resolve to act and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

I think that, given this tragic situation, the Security Council is in agreement on the overall strategy that should guide us in our endeavours to address humanitarian and political issues and to strengthen the presence of peacekeeping forces in the field. I shall comment on each of these points.

First, I believe that we must do everything in our power to improve the security situation in Darfur, in terms of protecting civilians and of ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers. I took note of the fact that President Bashir, in his recent letter addressed to the Secretary-General, stated that the protection of civilians was the responsibility of the Sudanese police. I believe that the Security Council cannot accept such a statement — that the United Nations cannot accept such a statement. As Mr. Holmes stated, the Sudanese Government has a particular responsibility to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.

The seriousness of the humanitarian situation, as described by Mr. Holmes, the continuing violations of international humanitarian law and of human rights, and the acts of violence that daily force increasing numbers of Sudanese to flee their homes are clear evidence of the fact that a generalized climate of violence persists in Darfur and that the Sudanese authorities are not discharging their responsibilities with regard to the protection of civilians.

Of course, the responsibility to protect — and this is something that we discussed at length in 2004 — lies mainly with the Government, but failure on its part to discharge that responsibility forces the international community to intercede. All parties on the ground bear responsibility for that persistent climate of generalized violence, and the Council must therefore be prepared to draw the necessary conclusions.

Secondly, it is crucial to facilitate access by humanitarian workers to all persons requiring assistance. France has taken note of the guarantees recently provided by the Sudanese Government aimed at facilitating international humanitarian operations in Darfur. That is a step in the right direction, but it is only a step. We hope that the Sudanese authorities, at all levels, will implement those measures in a resolute manner.

Allow me to recall that the removal of the obstacles impeding humanitarian operations is one of the common goals agreed in the joint communiqué signed by the United Nations and the Sudanese Government in July 2004.

However, humanitarian efforts cannot resolve the underlying problem in the Sudan, which requires a political solution. In that regard, I should like to reaffirm France's full support for the efforts undertaken by the United Nations and African Union mediators, Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim, to ensure that all parties abide by the ceasefire and to promote the resumption of the Abuja Agreement political process.

I should like to reiterate our support for the efforts of the Secretary-General, working jointly with the African Union, to deploy in Darfur a peacekeeping force with the capacity to ensure the safety of the civilian population.

Having mentioned the African force, I would like to offer my condolences to the Government of Senegal on the loss of five soldiers who were working for peace in Darfur.

We have taken note of the recent exchanges that took place in Riyadh between the Secretary-General and President Al-Bashir. We are awaiting confirmation over the next few days of the signals that were sent. We expect the Sudanese Government to implement the commitments made at Addis Ababa in December. It seems to us that the Security Council cannot wait much longer, since it is the fate of the people of Darfur and the stability of the region that are at stake.

Regarding the consequences of the crisis for neighbouring countries, I would like now to turn to the situation in Chad and in the Central African Republic. Tens of thousands of people from the Central African Republic and Chad have been displaced over the past few months, and the Under-Secretary-General emphasized the urgent need to provide humanitarian assistance. Like the Central African Republic, Chad requires our support as quickly as possible if it is to meet its considerable needs.

In the Central African Republic, the humanitarian situation is particularly difficult throughout the north of the country. There have been new, large-scale displacements and acts of abuse against civilians, which are particularly disturbing. In this regard, I take note of the analysis presented to us by Mr. Holmes, as well as the responses that he suggested.

With regard to the north-east, the continued insecurity is closely linked to instability in the border region of Chad and the Sudan. We welcome the recent announcement regarding the establishment of an OCHA humanitarian coordination office in the north of the country. My country believes that the deployment of a United Nations force to the eastern border, which is desired by President Bozizé and which we discussed recently, is absolutely necessary.

I also support Mr. Holmes' analysis regarding Chad. I believe that the international community too long underestimated the seriousness of the crisis that has affected the country because of the situation in Darfur. The violence has already resulted in the displacement of 120,000 people in the eastern part of the country, in addition to the 230,000 refugees. Despite the lack of resources and the constraints on the civilian population, Chad has agreed to make a significant effort by receiving those 230,000 refugees on its territory. However, as we know, the situation is fragile. Humanitarian organizations are having, with limited means, to deal with an increasing number of displaced persons, and, insecurity is spreading, including in the area of the camps.

I noted that Mr. Holmes stated that the humanitarian situation in the eastern part of the country has further worsened since the Security Council mission. I understand that Mr. Holmes believes that the Chadian army, which is having to deal with attacks by rebel forces, is unable to guarantee security for the region. I believe that it will be important for the Department of Peacekeeping Operations mission — the principles for which were established when the Foreign Minister of Chad, Mr. Allam-Mi Ahmat came to talk with the Security Council — to be deployed rapidly to N'Djamena, and that we receive a report on the situation so that we can take any necessary decisions.

Ms. Tincopa (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We, too, would like to thank Mr. Holmes for the up-to-date information that he provided, informing us about the situation in that part of the African region. We share his concerns regarding the deteriorating security situation there, which has further impeded humanitarian assistance programmes.

We regret the fact that, in spite of the good intentions of the international community, including the Security Council, the civilian population, in particular displaced persons and refugees from the three countries to which he referred, continue to lack protection and that the situation continues to be one of total impunity. Given the difficult situation on the ground, in which, we have heard, women and girls are being raped and subjected to other acts of abuse and children are being recruited by militias and groups involved in conflict, we are bogged down in seemingly technical discussions about the United Nations presence, the presence of the African Union in the case of Darfur and the multinational presence in the case of Chad. We see the consequences of these delays in terms of human lives lost.

Like others, we are of the view that the resolution of the Darfur crisis is the key to restoring stability to the Sudan and to the region as a whole, in particular Chad and the Central African Republic. In this regard, we support all the efforts that are being made, including the work undertaken by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, Mr. Jan Eliasson, and by the African Union mediator, Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim, to consult with the various parties to conflict with a view to moving the peace process forward.

We also welcome the progress that has been made in the context of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the south, with regard to which OCHA will continue its efforts. In that connection, it is important that the Government take steps to implement a social development plan in the area.

We also consider the agreement signed by the Sudanese Government and the United Nations to be a positive tool with a view to facilitating the distribution of humanitarian assistance. In this regard, we would like to ask Mr. Holmes what he believes the Security Council could do to monitor the full implementation of the agreement, which we believe is very important for protecting the civilian population by facilitating humanitarian assistance.

We would also like to ask whether OCHA has taken measures in preparation for the forthcoming rainy season so as to ensure that access to humanitarian assistance is not further impeded in that area.

Mr. Arias (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): Like preceding speakers, I should like to thank Under-Secretary-General Holmes for his clear, detailed and, especially, powerful briefing.

I welcome the fact that no Council member has said that this issue belongs within the purview of other forums of the Organization. It seems that when human suffering crosses borders, that fact alone makes it an issue that the Security Council must address. Let us not forget that, while borders are interesting to diplomats, politicians and mapmakers, borders are of little or no importance to the people who live in a region such as this.

Panama emphasizes that we must seek mechanisms to ensure that various United Nations organs and forums act in a more coordinated manner.

That applies in particular to the Security Council and the Human Rights Council. Recently, the Human Rights Council sent a mission to the Sudan, which was not permitted to enter. This Council and the rest of the Organization ignored that deplorable situation. Moreover, the Human Rights Council has just adopted a resolution on the Sudan, and here we have not taken official note of it.

Panama also reiterates that the declaration of our heads of State or Government of 2005 (General Assembly resolution 60/1), which linked security, development and human rights and established the principle of the responsibility to protect, must have some practical effect. Mr. Holmes, at the end of his presentation, stated that the tragic human rights situation in the region is clearly linked to the political situation.

The tendency in the Organization is for political problems to be dealt with bureaucratically and by the Secretariat or by the diplomats — a trend that we are following today. I wonder whether it would not be appropriate for the Organization to ensure that the current political leaders in various regions and countries, in addressing situations like these, take matters more directly in hand; to ensure that visits to these countries strengthen not only bilateral political and economic ties, but also somehow the ties between political leaders; and to ensure that such leaders — who, like diplomats, have a way of communicating with one another — more resolutely and energetically confront the problem of human rights violations.

Would Mr. Holmes like to make any response concerning those issues?

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): I wish to join others in welcoming Under-Secretary-General John Holmes to his first meeting with the Security Council and to thank him for his briefing on his recent visit to the Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic. We share the view that the humanitarian situation in the region — in Darfur, eastern Chad and north-eastern Central African Republic — is a source of serious concern, especially as the environment has become even more challenging.

My delegation supports the observation that, unless there is a durable peaceful solution to the issue of Darfur, the humanitarian crisis in the region will be increasingly difficult to resolve. However, pending the emergence of peace in Darfur, all parties need to do their best to ensure that the humanitarian effort goes forward unimpeded.

We therefore welcome the recent signing of the joint communiqué between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations on the facilitation of humanitarian activities in Darfur. We encourage the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations, as well as humanitarian organizations, to make the best use of such facilitation and therefore to help alleviate humanitarian suffering.

We believe that humanitarian needs must be addressed as a matter of priority. But the most imperative need is for a political settlement, which must be achieved as a final resolution of the humanitarian crisis in Darfur as well as a contribution to the settlement of the crises in eastern Chad and northern Central African Republic.

In that regard, we welcome the outcome of the recent meeting in Riyadh between the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the African Union (AU) chairpersons and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, with President Al-Bashir, particularly with regard to their commitment to redouble efforts to bring all parties into the peace process and to accelerate political reconciliation and their recognition of the need for the United Nations, the AU and the Arab League to work together to seek an early and comprehensive settlement of the conflict and to end the humanitarian suffering in Darfur.

With regard to the humanitarian situation in eastern Chad, we would like to hear further views of the Under-Secretary-General on how the United Nations could improve that situation pending the deployment of a United Nations monitoring and protection mission in the area.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): I, too, welcome Under-Secretary-General Holmes and thank him for his briefing, which has helped us to better understand the sources and the dynamics of the instability prevailing today in the regions bordering Darfur.

Let me say at the outset that Italy joins other delegations in expressing deepest concern about the humanitarian situation in the region and in commending the role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the personal efforts of Mr. Holmes.

The protection of civilians on the ground is a widely shared priority. It is the guiding principle of our work — a principle on which we must always focus in our discussions and in our decisions. Italy supports the role of the United Nations in that regard. We underline the need for full cooperation by the Sudanese authorities with the United Nations and with the humanitarian organizations involved in the region. We believe that security and access are of capital importance, as has already been stated this morning.

At the same time, we welcome the attention that Under-Secretary-General Holmes, visiting Juba, paid to the unsolved problems of South Sudan. We believe that that is an important signal in order to tackle those problems within an appropriate regional framework. The Council should not let the Darfur crisis divert its attention from the peace process in the south and should renew its collective and individual pressures on the parties in that respect.

Finally, we welcome the consensual position expressed by the Human Rights Council regarding respect for human rights in Darfur. We look forward to operational follow-up.

I have a few questions to bring to the attention of Under-Secretary-General Holmes.

First, on the signing of the joint communiqué between the Government of the Sudan and the United Nations, we believe that it is an important and timely commitment that comes at an appropriate time for the activities of the humanitarian operations. Similar documents have been signed on previous occasions, but unfortunately they have not been fully implemented. Has the Under-Secretary-General received any further guarantees concerning the implementation of the communiqué?

Secondly, what is Mr. Holmes' opinion regarding the possible implications of the good news on the humanitarian assistance track? Can it be considered a sign, a positive indication, of goodwill on the part of the Sudanese authorities, making it possible to strengthen the current efforts on the political track as well?

Finally, on Chad, I think that Under-Secretary-General Holmes, after meeting with the Prime Minister in Chad, publicly expressed some signs of relative optimism. Would he please elaborate further on that and tell us whether he has reason to be confident.

I cannot conclude without expressing Italy's deepest condolences to the Senegalese authorities and the families of the peacekeepers of the African Union Mission in the Sudan who were killed last Sunday.

Mr. Al-Qahtani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for his briefing, which we believe has raised awareness and concern about the humanitarian difficulties faced by some African States. We join other States in calling for the humanitarian situation in those countries to be addressed as soon as possible and for the provision of the necessary humanitarian assistance to the countries that have been affected by the conflicts to which he referred.

There is no doubt that the humanitarian situation in Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic requires that we keep working to ensure that the Governments of those countries continue their efforts to address it. That should be done in cooperation and coordination with the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs in an effort to provide the necessary protection for the staff of humanitarian relief organizations.

We welcome the explicit pledges made in recent weeks by the Sudanese Government as a result of the positive meetings held by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. The steps taken by the Government of the Sudan, as described by the Under-Secretary-General, are the best proof of progress on this issue.

On the political level, my delegation welcomes the constructive meetings held in Khartoum in recent weeks between the President of the Sudan and Mr. Salim Ahmed Salim to revive the Darfur Peace Agreement. We believe that will lead to a resolution of the differences between the Sudanese Government and the United Nations as regards the three-phased plan provided for in the Darfur Peace Agreement, the Addis Ababa talks and the Abuja agreements. We welcome the efforts made by the States of the region; moreover, the Arab Summit in Riyadh also addressed the issue of Darfur in an effort to find speedy and effective solutions to that crisis.

We should not miss any opportunity to bring about peace, whether in Darfur or in any other area of conflict. We must build on the progress that has been achieved in order to bring about peace, stability and a full understanding of the root causes of these problems.

We believe that the military option is not conducive to the resolution of any crisis, regardless of its source. We also believe that the way to emerge from a crisis is to identify a mechanism for frank discussions based on respect and genuine and sincere political will at the national, regional and international levels.

The three States that I have mentioned bear primary responsibility to protect their civilians, while taking all necessary legitimate steps to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call upon those Governments to undertake every necessary measure to bring to justice all those responsible for crimes, so as to put an end to impunity and establish the rule of law.

We have a few questions for the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs. First, as Mr. Holmes has not been involved in the political efforts undertaken by Mr. Salim Ahmed Salem and Mr. Jan Eliasson, we would like to know his view of those efforts. Secondly, the Government of the Sudan has not rejected the three-phased proposal, but has stated that some aspects of that proposal contradict the Darfur Peace Agreement. Has Mr. Holmes taken up that issue with the Sudanese Government?

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Kingdom.

I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his very thought-provoking briefing.

It is striking that, three years since we first began to debate this issue, the situation in the Sudan, and in Darfur in particular, remains desperate, and that, worse still, despite the efforts of the Security Council, the United Nations family and everyone else, the situation has infected neighbouring countries.

In the Sudan, humanitarian workers, including those of non-governmental organizations, have been helping the most vulnerable, in the face of significant and continued obstacles. I think they deserve the support and recognition of the Council. The joint communiqué is very welcome, but it will be useful only if it is implemented. Too many arrangements in the past have fallen into disuse or have not been applied. We will therefore hold all those involved to account and will expect them actually to put in to practice what they have said they will do.

To make a real difference to the humanitarian situation we have heard about, the Government of the Sudan and, today especially, the rebels, need to take further concrete steps. The arms embargo needs to be complied with. We need to agree upon and implement a ceasefire, engage in a political process and reach an agreement, stop the attacks on humanitarian workers, stop attacks on the African Union Mission in the Sudan (AMIS) — and, like others, we mourn the deaths of the five AMIS soldiers earlier this week — and everybody involved must fulfil their responsibilities to uphold international humanitarian law. Quite separately, the Government of the Sudan has to maintain its block on aerial attacks. Of course, we anticipate seeing the deployment of the heavy support package and the hybrid force as soon as possible. For without urgent action on all those points by all those involved, we will face a further crisis. The real choice will be whether we take tough measures against perpetrators.

With regard to Chad and the Central African Republic, we have heard the evidence and have had the terrible reminder of the attacks on the villages of Tiero and Marena on Saturday. As regards the need for adequate protection of civilians — and, perhaps above all, of people in United Nations camps, who have been given sanctuary but not yet been given safety — we need to deliver safety. I very much hope that there will be agreement with President Déby and his Government soon. Of course, the willingness of the Central African Republic to support and accept an effective United Nations presence is welcome. But it is also an indication of how dire the situation is and of why it needs assistance.

Finally, in terms of Southern Sudan and Juba, however difficult it is, we must continue our support for the Juba process and the prospect it offers for bringing relief and, hopefully, a solution to the ongoing and very substantial humanitarian crisis in northern Uganda. Above all, we must continue our attempts to bring an end to the activities of the Lord's Resistance Army. We therefore very much welcome President Chissano's efforts, and confirm what the Council said in its 22 March presidential statement (S/PRST/2007/6).

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I give the floor to Mr. Holmes to respond to the points made in the discussion.

Mr. Holmes: I will try to cover the various points that have been raised by the representatives around the table.

First of all, it gives me no pleasure to say this, but I note that there is a large measure of agreement on the analysis of the gravity of the humanitarian situation in all three countries. There is no dispute as to the seriousness and the need to take action. I think that is an important message for all of us.

I also agree very much with those, such as the representatives of Belgium and France, who have said that we need to press on with all our efforts in parallel, if you will — that is to say, the search for a political solution, which is being led at the moment by Jan Eliasson and Salim Ahmed Salim. I am happy to confirm, in response to the representative of Qatar, that I give my full support to those political efforts. I think that the effort to find a lasting political solution which all the parties can sign up to and respect afterwards is absolutely fundamental, because without that it is very hard to see how we are going to make the progress we need and put an end to the tragic humanitarian problems that I have talked about.

In parallel, obviously, we need to continue the effort to put in place a strengthened peacekeeping force in Darfur, and I agree with those who have put their emphasis on that. It is clearly important, as the representative of South Africa said, that we give our continued support to the presence of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS). AMIS is facing a number of difficulties — not just the recent tragic loss of its personnel, but also difficulties in carrying out its mandate in the situation in which it finds itself. It needs our support. It needs continuing financial and other support from us while we await its strengthening with the heavy support package and, ultimately, the hybrid force, because that is an essential building block for a future force. So I hope that everybody will contribute in whatever way they can to the maintenance in place of AMIS and its future strengthening.

Many people have referred in a welcoming way to the joint communiqué which was agreed on 28 March. Many people have asked how we can reinforce support for that. I repeat my own welcome for that agreement, but I also repeat what I said in my introductory statement: the key is not in the words contained in the agreement, but in whether it is actually implemented. As various representatives have pointed out, we have seen similar agreements in the past that have sometimes been respected for a period, but then that respect has declined. What we want to see in this particular case is implementation of a continued and complete nature. I think it is important that countries represented around this table, and the international community in general, follow the implementation of the agreement in Khartoum themselves through their local representatives.

An important part of the agreement is the establishment of a practical follow-up committee on which there are representatives of the donors and the non-governmental organizations, and that would therefore be a mechanism to keep implementation of the agreement on track. But it would also be very helpful if constant attention were paid to that by representatives of the international community in Khartoum. It was helpful, for example, that, shortly before my arrival in Khartoum on the occasion of the annual aid consortium meeting, mainly devoted to the southern Sudan, the representatives of the countries who were there put a very strong emphasis on the need to resolve those bureaucratic problems and made clear their desire to see some progress. I think that kind of attention is very welcome, and of course if the Security Council wanted to call for regular reports on how that was being implemented, that would no doubt be a helpful step as well.

Various representatives have commented on what I said about the regional nature of the conflict and how resolving the conflict in Darfur is the key to solving the regional conflict. Of course, I agree with that, but I would also point out that I added that there are in each case national conflicts and national political issues which need to be resolved independently of whether there is a resolution in Darfur. We must not lose sight of that and the need to tackle those issues as well.

Many representatives have echoed the point I made about the importance of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in the southern Sudan and the need not to lose sight of that. I think the representatives of South Africa, Peru and Italy, for example, referred to that. I repeat that it is absolutely vital. Because the immediate humanitarian needs are diminishing, I am glad to say that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) itself is beginning to

centralize its presence in Juba, rather than have the network of offices we have had around the South of the Sudan, but we are by no means withdrawing our presence and we remain ready to respond to humanitarian crises as they arise. It is important, however, that the rest of the United Nations development, recovery and reconstruction system step up to the plate to take the development of South Sudan forward effectively so that there is no gap and there is an effective transition.

The representative of Slovakia asked about other African conflicts and my travel plans. I am still finalizing my travel plans for the coming months, but I would like to visit Somalia because of the deep humanitarian problems there. That depends, obviously, to a large extent on security. I would like to visit Uganda, in particular northern Uganda, because of the depth of the problems there, which we have already talked about, and the need to ensure that the Juba peace process continues, puts an eventual stop to the problems there, and allows the many displaced persons to return to their homes. I think it is important that I visit, at some relatively early stage, the Democratic Republic of the Congo because, again, there are still enormous operations there and enormous problems. I would also like to pay a visit at some stage — perhaps later this year — to the West African and Sahel regions, which I think perhaps need a visit of that kind at some stage.

I think that kind of combination of visits would enable me to look at not only conflict situations, but also the problems raised by natural hazards and disasters and the effects of poverty as well. I have no current plans to visit Zimbabwe myself, but it is possible that a senior representative of OCHA will go there at some point this year.

The representative of the Russian Federation asked about the use of the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) in the region. I have some figures which I can give members of the Council. In Chad, the Central Emergency Response Fund has contributed some $10 million in 2006 and $7.5 million so far this year. In the Central African Republic, CERF contributed $5.5 million in 2006 and $4.5 in 2007. And of course, we have used CERF extensively in Darfur itself; in 2006, some $34 million were contributed and, so far in 2007, up to $39 million altogether, including a loan. We are continuing to look at further use of CERF in all those areas, but I think it is a good illustration of CERF in responding to immediate needs that we have been able to use it in that way.

Several representatives, not least the representative of Qatar, have asked about the prospect for the hybrid peacekeeping force and the three-phase approach in Darfur, and referred to the meeting between President Bashir and Secretary-General Ban in the margins of the Arab League summit last week. We are indeed hopeful that some progress was made at that meeting, and we are hoping — as the Secretary-General said, I think, earlier in the week — to organize a meeting with representatives of the Sudanese Government and the African Union in Addis Ababa next week, which we hope will represent progress towards putting in place the heavy support package and, ultimately, the hybrid force. I think our interpretation of this meeting is that it is to clarify what we intend to do on the heavy support package and the hybrid force, not to start a long and possibly fruitless negotiation about the details of the force. It is very much a clarificatory meeting, as we see it.

On the question of the proposed peacekeeping force in Chad and the Central African Republic, I should say that I agree with those representatives who have commented on the importance of putting it in place soon, as I also said in my opening statement. It is quite clear, as the representative of France, for example, said, that President Bozizé of the Central African Republic is very anxious to see this force deployed because of the delicate situation in the north-eastern Central African Republic caused by cross-border incursions of various kinds. I think that underlines the importance of moving rapidly on that issue.

I can confirm, incidentally, in response to the comments of the representative of France, that we — the United Nations, not necessarily the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) — are proposing to open a series of United Nations offices in the north of the Central African Republic in order to enable us to deal more effectively with the humanitarian problems there, because of the difficulties of communication and infrastructure.

The representative of Peru asked what measures we had in mind to deal with the forthcoming rainy season in all three countries. I think we are extremely conscious that the rainy season in all three places represents a huge challenge. It differs from place to

place, depending on how heavy the rains are in different areas. It tends to be easier in the north than in southern parts of the countries we are dealing with. For example, in the southern part of eastern Chad, it is clear that the rainy season makes virtually all movement in the area impossible. That can apply also to the Central African Republic and to parts of southern Darfur. It is therefore absolutely vital that we have the necessary assistance in place before the rainy season.

This is a familiar problem, but it nevertheless presents considerable difficulties — for example, in eastern Chad, in having the right amount of stocks in the right places before the rainy starts: as I say, once the season starts overland movement becomes virtually impossible because of flooded wadis in the area. That is why, for example, in eastern Chad, we have put a lot of emphasis on the rapid development — which we hope to have in place later this week — of an urgent 90-day plan for all humanitarian organizations dealing with these problems in eastern Chad, so as to have in place everything that we need before that rainy season starts.

We are looking at very much the same sort of thing in the Central African Republic. Just to give one example, it is clearly crucial that the people who are displaced in the bush, as I was describing earlier, and who have lost their stocks of seeds and their agricultural tools should be given access to seeds and tools in the next few weeks so that they can cultivate their fields and plant crops. Otherwise, the food situation in 6, 12 or 18 months could become even more dramatic than it is now. The World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations are working very hard to try to ensure that those items can be distributed effectively to those scattered through the bush, although one can imagine the logistical problems that that presents at the moment.

The representative of Panama asked about the contribution that political leaders can make to finding political solutions to some of these problems, and I entirely agree with him that those who are visiting these countries in whatever form should take every opportunity to press for political solutions and not simply concern themselves with bilateral problems. I hope that that will be the case in the future. It is also very important that when political leaders visit these countries they take the opportunity to become advocates for humanitarian principles and humanitarian effects — not least, as so many representatives around the table have noted, the need for the fundamental protection of civilians to be put in place much more effectively in all the countries we have been talking about than it is at present.

The representative of Indonesia asked how the United Nations could improve the situation in eastern Chad. I think I partly answered that question in reference to the urgent 90-day plan that we are putting in place in cooperation with all the non-governmental organizations and agencies there. We are also looking, as I said, I think, in my opening remarks, to put into place a comprehensive strategy for the next two or three years which can deal at the same time with the problems of the Sudanese refugees who are there and with the problems of the internally displaced persons there, and also with the problems of the host communities: they have been very generous, as has been noted, in welcoming the refugees and the displaced people, but they have nothing left to share now and they are beginning to suffer themselves from the pressure that all these people are putting on the resources of an area that is very fragile and difficult to start with.

The representative of Italy asked, like others, about the timely implementation of the joint communiqué. I think I have partly answered that question. I think that we have no absolute guarantees on implementation of the agreement, but we hope that follow-up committee put in place will provide a mechanism to do that. But, as I say, I think the most important point is that we all continue to give attention to it, to watch closely and to be vocal if we see any signs of backsliding in the implementation of this agreement, which, as I think I have suggested, is vital in many ways for the continuation of the humanitarian effort. It is the combination of the insecurity and the bureaucratic problems which saps the morale of the humanitarian workers in place and renders the operation fragile.

The representative of Italy also asked whether I saw any signs of optimism in Chad following my meeting with the Prime Minister. I have to say that I did not. I had a very good discussion with the Prime Minister of Chad, but I think the problems there, as I have indicated, remain very serious and, if anything, are getting worse. There is a real issue to deal with there, and a real need to move forward, not only with the humanitarian operation, as I have indicated, but also with the deployment of a force in the area. It is

very difficult to see how people can be protected without that.

I hope that I have dealt with all the problems that people around the table have raised. I apologize if I have missed any, but I think I have covered the ground.

The President: I would like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing and for the visit he made on this trip and for the visits he plans to make in the future. I think it is clear from the discussion today that there is concern in the Council at the deteriorating humanitarian situation, particularly in the Sudan, but increasingly in Chad and the Central African Republic too. I think we all have conveyed today that we see a pressing need for a political solution, both within and between the countries we have heard about. Those countries will naturally remain high on the Council's agenda.

Perhaps I could, on behalf of the Council, pass on to the Under-Secretary-General the Council's admiration, recognition and gratitude for the courageous, difficult and essential work done every day by the United Nations and by other humanitarian agencies and actors in the region we have discussed today, and around the world. They really do deserve our praise, thanks and support. Perhaps I could ask the Under-Secretary-General to pass that on to his team.

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.20 p.m.